

Canokia Court House
Chicago, Illinois

HABS 26-31-A

HABS
ILL,
16-CHIG,
3-

See Also
ILL,
82-CAHO,
4-

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No.26

Historic American Buildings Survey
Earl H. Reed, Jr. District Officer
Room 404, No. 520 N. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, Illinois

CAHOKIA COURT HOUSE
 Formerly at
 Cahokia, St. Clair County, Illinois
 Later at
 Louisiana Purchase Exposition
 At St. Louis, St. Louis County, Mo.
 Now at
 South End of Wooded Island
 Jackson Park, Chicago, Illinois.

HABS
 ILL,
 16-CHIG,
 3-

DISTRICT NO. 26 6
 NORTHERN ILLINOIS

EARL H. REED, JR.
 DISTRICT OFFICER

Project No. 26-31

By Geo.W.Terp, Jr.

The story of Cahokia Court House is a long and varied one. Tradition dates it as early as 1716. Certain it is that it occupied its location on the Parade Ground in sleepy Cahokia, perhaps the earliest of the French settlements in Illinois, until its unfortunate removal to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1905 when it was re-erected in partial form. ^{It was} Neglected after the Exposition, ^{it was} through the generous interest of a group of Chicagoans, it was brought to Jackson Park in 1906, where it was measured by members of the Survey. Again its extent has been reduced, and the structure presented, herewith, only faintly suggests the charming Creole character of the ancient structure; its splendid black walnut logs, a few weatherbeaten roof shakes, and some rough furniture are all that remain witness of a memorable past. Here follows the chronological history of site and building.

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| 1698 | "This would seem to fix a limit for the date of the establishment of the missions of Cahokia and Kaskaskia" | <u>SOURCE</u>
St. Louis
County
Missouri
History |
| 1712 | "In this year, 1712, both Cahokia and Kaskaskia have an authenticated record. There was a church and mission in each place." | |
| 1716 | Traditional date of its erection according to comparatively recent newspaper articles. | |
| 1720 | King of France granted land adjoining on east as a public "Parade". | Chicago
Tribune
March 13, |
| 1762 | Treaty of Paris, Great Britain is ceded Louisiana east of Mississippi. | 1934 |
| 1765 | Capt. Stirling of British Army received surrenders of French forts. | St. Louis
County
History |

- SOURCE
- 1767 "This is the first settlement on the River Mississippi. The Present State of European Settlements on the Mississippi, Captain Phillip Pittman 1770-London
- "What is called the fort is a small house standing in the center of the village; it differs in nothing from the other houses except in being one of the poorest; it was formerly enclosed with high palisades, but these were torn down and burned. Indeed a fort at this place could be of little use.
- 1778 1790 records of a court at Cahokia written in French (Transl.1907) Illinois State His.Lib.
- 1779 First American Court sessions in Illinois country; Virginia Court. J.V.Nash Greater Chicago Magazine 1926
- General George Rogers Clark at Cahokia.
- 1783 Became part of Virginia when Great Britain relinquished claim in Peace of Paris.
- 1787 Ordinance of Government of Northwest Territory passed. Arthur St. Clair was the first Governor. St. Clair county formed. Cahokia and Kaskaskia both county seats. History of St.Clair County.
- 1790 Date of building according to old news item in Chicago Historical Society "Early Illinois Towns" scrap book article, evidently from a St.Louis news paper printed about 1880.
- 1793 "Prior to its becoming the court house of St.Clair County, the building was used for a private dwelling and was bought from Jean Francois Saucier (A Revolutionary War soldier who came to Illinois at an early date and planned Fort de Chartres in 1752) October 8, 1793 by Antoine Girardin, John Dumoulin and Phillip Engel, judges of the court of common pleas, the purchase price being \$1000.00. History of St.Clair County and J.V.Nash. Ill.State Hst.Soc. Journal 1915
- On December 12, 1794 these judges published a declaration to the effect that their names were made use of in this transaction in trust only for the benefit of St.Clair County.

- 1793 In the deed of conveyance the property is thus described; "All that certain meniage or dwelling house (converted into a prison and court house) and lot of land thereto belonging situated in the Village of Cahokia, bounded in front by a street next to the River; on the east by a vacant lot, commonly known by the name of "Parade"; on the south by a lot now belonging to John Dumoulin, Esq. and on the west by a street running between the said lot and the lot of widow Boillieu."
- 1794 "First recorded public school sessions in Illinois are said to have been held in this old court house in 1794." J.V.Nash
- 1809 Illinois becomes independent territory and Kaskaskia the new Capitol.
- 1813 First County Court held at Cahokia. St.Clair County History
- 1814 County seat was moved to Bellville.
- 1819 Ceased to function as a court house.
- 1880 News paper description - St.Louis paper. "The dilapidated structure already refered to is the Court House of Court Saloon, as it is called now. This was the first court house in the west, and was built about 1790. It is constructed after the style adopted by the French in their early dwellings, having a steep wedge shaped roof, board blinds, and a veranda extending entirely around. The materials are upright cedar posts filled between with stones and mortar." Chicago Historical Society Scrap Book
- 1885 "Early Illinois Towns" (Undated news paper)

The chimney is the same, the wood being horizontal. So strong was the building that the earthquake of 1812 and the several floods did it no damage. The difference in this respect between the first houses erected by the French and English in their colonies is notable; the English seemed to intend that their earliest structures should be temporary and in the places first selected by them.

There are no traces of their original buildings, while in the French colonies many remain.

After Bellville was made the county seat in 1819, the Cahokia Court house was converted into a saloon whence the present appellation "Court Saloon". The court room became the bar-room, the bar being the corner where the jury box had stood. When the saloon was discontinued the house was used for a jail until Cahokia was deprived of that privilege.

Two farmers now occupy the rear of the building; the old court and jury room are no more in use. Rags and other refuse are strewn over the floors, the rooms are damp and dingy, great pieces of plastering have fallen from the low ceiling and the rest is cracked as if in protest against the base uses to which the quondam halls of justice have come."

- 1899 Photo by Mr. J. Siler of St. Louis shows "Cahokia one end of the building with "Boulins", or Records" vertical logs and a chimney of stratified stone. Long sides of the building have clapboard siding. The veranda extends entirely around the building.
- 1905 Used as a concession at St. Louis Worlds Fair. Concessionaire lost money on it and did not return it to its original location. Valentine Smith Chicago Historical Society
- 1906 Bought for Chicago Centennial Committee by Charles A. Plamondon and W.W. Tracy.
- 1934 The present assemblage of "Boulins", similar in arrangement to that in St. Louis, but without fireplace and certainly smaller in size than the original, was measured for permanent record. It is now a one room structure as contrasted to the one reported in the 80's. Thanks are due the South Park Commissioners who have protected and maintained it since 1906. Without their custodianship and the interest of the Chicago Historical Society probably nothing would remain. It is hoped that means will be found to remove this still impressive old structure to its original location and restore it.

By *George W. [Signature]*

Approved *Emil [Signature]*
District Officer

Cahokia Courthouse,
Cahokia, Illinois.

SEE ALSO

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Central Illinois

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
CENTRAL UNIT—ST. LOUIS

Historic American Buildings Survey
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602 Corn Belt Bank Building, Bloomington, Illinois.